

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 17, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Eugene Scalia
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Scalia,

I write to express my concern and bring your attention to the devolving and dangerous situation in Iowa, where several meat packing plants have suspended operations after the spread of COVID-19, while others are at risk of closure because of outbreaks. While there is no business or industry untouched by the pandemic, affected plants have seen infections spread and I fear that the situation is only growing worse. We must put the health and safety of Iowa families above all else at this time.

Existing resources and guidance have proven insufficient in keeping these workers safe. I urge you to use your expertise and understanding of our food supply chain to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to deploy resources immediately, as well as develop and implement meaningful safety standards for our food processing facilities.

The risk to those working in these processing plants is undeniable, despite some companies' best efforts. National Beef shuttered its plant in Tama County after several employees were infected with COVID-19, and in an effort to prevent spread, JBS in Marshalltown temporarily stopped production to sanitize the plant. Earlier this week, two employees of the Tyson plant in Columbus Junction, Iowa, died and the plant has been closed. With more than 150 plant employees testing positive for COVID-19, the outbreak is among the most severe in the state.

Not only do these outbreaks threaten the lives of our workers, they also have devastating consequences for the food supply chain in Iowa. Without anywhere to sell their hogs, farmers could be put in a difficult—and sometimes heartbreaking—position about what to do with their livestock. Some may be forced to euthanize animals within a matter of weeks. Unless steps are taken to effectively prevent and manage future outbreaks, we will undoubtedly see more food processing facilities close for extended periods, devastating our farmers as a result.

Iowa plays a critical role in our nation's economy as a major player in the domestic food supply chain. By protecting the essential employees who work in our processing plants, we are protecting the future of our state. They need testing, personal protective equipment, and leave policies that put their health ahead of the bottom line. Employers also need resources and clarity on how to protect them. During this public health crisis, when it

comes to safety measures and equipment, a one-size-fits-all approach just doesn't cut it. We must do more for the people who make sure that we have food on our grocery store shelves.

With so many friends and neighbors in my district relying on our meat processing plants, this issue is personal to me. Already, I have heard from community members in Waterloo, Iowa, worried about employees at the Tyson plant there, wanting to make sure that they are safe, and hoping that these good jobs stay in our community for years to come.

That is why I again respectfully call on you to provide the resources to protect workers at these plants and work with our public health experts to put forth enforceable, industry-specific guidance and standards. Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to your response.

Please do not hesitate to reach my office at (202) 225-2911 if you have any questions.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Abby', followed by a stylized flourish.

Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress

CC:

Mr. Robert Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road Northeast
Atlanta, Georgia 30329